

ART RECESS 6

ISSUES AROUND FORMALITY

On Dominique/Ode On Psyche



So many stories are wrapped up in this next poem, some hilarious, some harrowing. It all revolves around a single woman and her phenomenal ability to enthrall men. Her name was, and is, Dominique, and I've never met anyone like her. When I met her, I was a high school junior and she was a freshman. She was stunningly beautiful, with a seductive, feline grace that suggested both Lolita and Liv Tyler. This alone wouldn't qualify her to play such an interesting part in my life and the lives of those around me; there were a lot of beautiful girls at Cheltenham; but Dominique had something more. What do we call that ineffable IT, that compelling magnetism that certain people have? Is it merely beauty, or charisma, or youth? For me, Dominique's charm lay in all these things, and also in something extra- a certain mischievous glint in her eye, a certain toss of her head, that suggested a sort of supernatural ecstasy, as if she were walking around in a narcotic trance all the time (which, I was later to learn, she was). Dominique was, quite simply, the most compelling female I'd met up to that point. Oddly enough, I didn't fall hard for her at all. I was able to keep my distance because, to a certain extent, I saw a hollowness beneath the charisma, an unwillingness to dig beneath surfaces and live truly. Dominique for me was a sort of caricature of adolescent sexiness, and I loved her archly condescending smile, but it didn't pierce me to the bone.

My best friend at the time, however, was absolutely, unbelievably, and pitifully smitten. He hung on her every word as though she was Godhead incarnate, recorded every encounter in an especially prized notebook, and just basically made an idiot of himself whenever she was around. Then, Dominique started dating another one of my friends, simultaneously making me her "Man of the Month," and things started to get really messy. A fist fight for me outside math class; a death threat; notes for me in the mail inscribed with lipstick, reading "He finds a deep satisfaction in pain; for that pain comes from her"; and other such nonsense. Basically Chris, aka Mr. Smitten, never forgave me for going after Dominique when he was so desperately in love, while Adam, Mr. Better-Attack-Me-Outside-Math-Class, became contrite years later and started randomly showing up at my gigs, camera in hand.

Having given you this background, you'll probably understand why running into Dominique on a sultry night in the East Village was such a big deal for me. I was lonely as hell in New York, overwhelmed, numbing myself with huge quantities of pot and speed pills. Dominique, for all her cattiness, rose to the occasion and delivered a knock-out performance as supportive friend with benefits. Unsurprisingly, she supported her academic career at NYU by dealing drugs, and I thought it would be fair game to throw that in, seeing as it was honest. Formally, this piece is me trying my best to write like Keats, sort of the same thing William Carlos Williams was doing in his early twenties. For me, WCW's Keatsian poems aren't that good, probably because he didn't know Dominique. She's a Muse- a real, honest-to-God morsel of madness. Not that I've ever forgotten her implacable selfishness, remorseless narcissism and insufferable insularity; but it pays to remember what's best in her.

Sitting in Psyche's parlor, I almost touched her-  
she stretched herself towards me, cat-like,  
closing ice-blue eyes full of crocodile water,  
    & her stomach bare, & her hair blue-striped-  
like a Sphinx she reposed, with a riddle of flesh,  
to be solved in tongue-touching tenderness,  
despite Cupid shooting off on the phone-  
like a moon she arose, & her lips mine enmeshed,  
I clutched, clasped her in a teenage caress,  
her Mom didn't notice the moans.

If youth were faithful, Eros be damned,  
cruel Cupid would never leave home-  
back seats would stop rocking, beds be shammed,  
    & Venus would go home alone-  
in parks, in bars, the war went on,  
in which all is fair but fairness,  
    all full of joy but the spurned-  
in darkened cars, on new-mown lawns,  
enraptured or raptly embarrassed,  
    ripe-full of the pleasures that burned.

Years passed until I saw Psyche again,  
ripe for a time, & then jaded-  
we kissed, talked, she bade me a friend,  
her beauty unworried, untainted-  
no elfin grot enclosed her, no cave,  
Manhattan she recklessly roamed,  
courted by rich men & thieves-  
wild eyes pin-wheeled on parties, raves,  
small morning hours her home,  
nothing & no one she grieves.

Stories

- Mortuary Puppies:  
Outlaw  
Playwrights:  
State Colleg...
- A Dozen Loose  
Wires: A  
Chapbook (2019)
- A Dozen Leaking  
Buckets: A  
Chapbook (2014)

Return to

Art Recess



I fell at her feet, she flung me away,  
her friend came, some E hits to buy-  
I tossed on a tape, she laughed as it played,  
"Roxxxaaanne" came the heart-rending cry-  
she counted five hundreds, hid them away,  
pulled out her poems, asked me to read them,  
walking her friend to the door-  
I weighed all my options, if I should stay,  
holding the poems, not wanting to read them,  
feeling absurd on her floor.

She padded back softly, opened a window,  
stretched herself out on the sagging bed-  
I lay down beside her, close as a shadow,  
moved in to touch her with joy & dread-  
She stopped me at her silver belt,  
sensing why my words were soft,  
not about to blow her stolid cover-  
I couldn't make her armor melt,  
couldn't burn the surface off  
that wouldn't let me be her honest lover.

Stoned in the gloaming, dead on my feet,  
the Village I hit & then ran-  
did she like me, or did my candor defeat  
my manhood slipped out of her hands?  
To her body, taut with muscle,  
a goddess of bed, Venus unseen to his lover,  
notes torn from shadows of sighs-  
my body, all I'd hustled,  
seemed irrelevant, dead, & like a crab with no cover,  
crawled into the D train, & cried.

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